

HAIL, QUEEN ESTHER!

By **L.E. McCullough**

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From the book:

Plays of Ancient Israel: Legends from the Bible and Jewish Folklore

by L.E. McCullough, Ph.D.

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PURIM IS A Jewish holiday that celebrates Queen Esther's role in preventing a massacre of Persian Jews during the 6th century B.C.E.

Purim is named from the Hebrew word *pur*, meaning “lots”, which was what the minister Haman threw to select the month he would begin massacring Jews. Much merrymaking is associated with this holiday held on the 14th day of Adar, and celebrants are encouraged to send money to friends and family and distribute gifts of food and money to the poor.

In the Middle Ages special plays in Yiddish depicting the events of Purim (*purimshpil*) began to be created by yeshiva students and, eventually, professional theatre companies. The *purimshpil* is perhaps the earliest example of Jewish theatre in Europe and was first documented in a public performance in Ferrara, Italy, in 1567.

Both Jewish and Christian audiences attended these early *purimshpiln*, and by the 1700s, the form was widespread in Jewish communities throughout Europe.

Even today, in the 21st century, new *purimshpiln* are created and performed by theatre troupes around the world in honor of the brave Biblical Queen Esther, whose Hebrew name was Hadassah.

With its medieval telling of a Bible story, *Hail, Queen Esther!* bridges the transition to the plays in Volume Two in this series, *Plays of Israel Reborn* — see www.EducationalClassroomPlays.com.

STAGE SET: Drapes or flats conceal a double-seated throne on platform at mid-center, 2 chairs at mid right, a low banquet table at mid left; just above the chairs is a long drape or flat painted to simulate a wall of a theatre

CAST: 16 actors, min. 6 boys (•), 5 girls (+)

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| • Salomon Usque | • Lazaro Graziano |
| • Duke of Ferrara | + Duchess of Ferrara |
| • Rabbi Yosef/Mordecai | + Tamara Graziano/Esther |
| • King Ahasuerus | + 3 Princesses |
| • Haman | 2 Guards |
| | 3 Servants |

MUSIC: *Chag Purim; Ani Purim*

PROPS: 3 oranges; sheet of paper; 8-10 *graggars* (noisemakers, rattles); crown; a pair of dice; parchment scroll; 3 plates of *Hamantashen* (“Haman’s pockets” — triangle-shaped poppyseed or fruit cookies)

COSTUMES: Salomon Usque, Lazaro Graziano, Tamara Graziano, Rabbi Yosef, Duke and Duchess of Ferrara and Servants wear late 16th-century costumes befitting their gender and social status; characters in the *purimsphil* play wear Biblical attire — long-sleeved, ankle-length, plain-colored tunics, sandals, beards for adult men, veils for Princesses; King Ahasuerus wears brightly colored, richly patterned tunic as well as crown and other royal accessories; Haman can wear a three-cornered hat; Guards wear tapered, light-fitting trousers in use among Persian soldiers at the time; Queen Esther appears first in a plain tunic, then as Queen in more royal garb with a beaded tunic or scarf

GLOSSARY: *buo-na se-ra* — good evening (Italian); *sign-o-ras e sign-o-res* — ladies and gentlemen (It.); *graz-ie* — thanks (It.); *di-ver-tir-si* — enjoy yourself (It.); *buff-ó-ne* — clown (It.); *mag-nif-i-co* — magnificent (It.); *pur-im-shpil* — Purim play (Yiddish); *shme-ge-gge* — an untalented person (Yid.); *klutz* — a clumsy person (Yid.); *Ham-man-ta-shen* — Purim cookies (Yid.); *tal-lit* — prayer shawl (Hebrew)

(*LIGHTS UP FULL ON SALOMON USQUE standing at down center, facing audience.*)

SALOMON USQUE: (*bowing*) Buona sera, signoras e signores. Welcome here this evening to our theatre. My name is Salomon Usque, director of one of Europe’s most distinguished company of touring actors. We are very pleased to come to your city of Ferrara and perform for your Purim celebration. Here in our Jewish Year 5328, or the year 1567 by the calendar established by the most noble Julius Caesar, we have created a special play —

(*LAZARO GRAZIANO has entered from right, awkwardly juggling three oranges and interrupting Salomon; when the oranges fall to the ground, he grins widely and bows with a flourish to the audience and imaginary applause.*)

LAZARO GRAZIANO: Thank you, thank you, grazie, grazie! You are too kind!

SALOMON USQUE: Lazaro! What are you doing?

LAZARO GRAZIANO: Practicing for our *purimshpil*, same as you! My juggling act will get the crowd warmed up and ready for excitement!

SALOMON USQUE: Your juggling act will get them heading for the exit. Did we not agree that our play on Queen Esther was to be presented with dignity?

(Lazaro picks up an orange and begins peeling and eating it as he crosses to down center.)

LAZARO GRAZIANO: My poor, poor Salomon — we have traveled together throughout Europe and the Levant, to lands even Marco Polo dared not visit, but you still don't know what satisfies an audience! They want laughs and thrills. They want to be frightened and mystified! Dignity? Who needs it?

(Lazaro slips on an orange peel and spins around crazily before righting himself.)

SALOMON USQUE: Buffóne! Try to be serious for once in your life, Lazaro! The city of Ferrara is ruled by a Duke. This Duke has the reputation of being very severe. Some call him a tyrant. And he is not known to be a friend of the Jews. Fortunately, I have an acquaintance at court, and we have received the Duke's permission to present our play one night only.

LAZARO GRAZIANO: Magnifico! My daughter, Tamara, is ready to play the role of Esther, and I, Lazaro Graziano, will appear as —

SALOMON USQUE: Not so fast. We must still receive permission from the local rabbi, Yosef, or the Jewish community will not be permitted to attend. We will have a play but no audience.

LAZARO GRAZIANO: Trust me, Rabbi Yosef will not be a problem.

SALOMON USQUE: The last time I trusted you, I ended up in the middle of a river with neither a paddle nor a boat!

(RABBI YOSEF enters from left.)

RABBI YOSEF: Is this the lodging of the traveling players?

SALOMON USQUE: Rabbi Yosef! Please enter. We are honored by your visit.

(Rabbi Yosef crosses to down center as Lazaro awkwardly picks up debris from oranges, continuing to comically slip and stumble.)

SALOMON USQUE: We wish to present an entertainment for Purim.

RABBI YOSEF: An entertainment? This is highly irregular! In any case, the Duke would not allow it.

SALOMON USQUE: To the contrary, Rabbi, the Duke has already granted his permission as a boon for his Jewish subjects.

RABBI YOSEF: I do not see how—

SALOMON USQUE: The Christians have their morality plays that tell of saints and miracles. Why should we not celebrate our religious heritage? It will show the Duke we are as clever and talented as any of God's people.

RABBI YOSEF: Plays, entertainments! We have no need of these things! They distract us from what is real in the world!

SALOMON USQUE: And what is real in our world, Rabbi? Just last month in Genoa hundreds of Jews were expelled, driven from their homes. In Polotzk thousands of Jews were killed when Ivan the Terrible of Russia conquered the city. And in Cremona, our friendly neighbor to the west, ten thousand Jewish books were burned. Throughout Europe our people are persecuted. More than ever, they need to hear this story of hope and divine protection — the story of Queen Esther and the faithful Mordecai!

RABBI YOSEF: I do not know. I will have to consult Torah on this matter.

(Rabbi Yosef turns away; Lazaro steps forward, nudging and winking at Salomon.)

LAZARO GRAZIANO: Salomon, have you ever noticed what a remarkable resemblance Rabbi Yosef holds to Mordecai?

SALOMON USQUE: Why, yes, now that you mention it, my dear Lazaro, the Rabbi bears a striking likeness to the bold Mordecai.

(Rabbi Yosef half turns, noticing their conversation and becoming more and more puffed up by their flattery.)

LAZARO GRAZIANO: The wise Mordecai.

SALOMON USQUE: The handsome Mordecai.

LAZARO GRAZIANO: The Mordecai whom the people hailed as their protector.

SALOMON USQUE: And who so resembles our own Rabbi Yosef.

LAZARO GRAZIANO: Down to the very tip of his tallit!

SALOMON USQUE: If we were to present this play, Lazaro — not that we would do such a thing without the Rabbi's permission — who would you choose to play Mordecai?

LAZARO GRAZIANO: The wise, bold, handsome Mordecai whom the people—

SALOMON USQUE: The very same!

LAZARO GRAZIANO: Oh, I don't know. I suppose that young lad who works at the stable.

(Rabbi Yosef whirls around.)

RABBI YOSEF: Nonsense! No sapling of a boy can equal my experience! I was born to play the role of Mordecai! The people demand it!

SALOMON USQUE: Then play it you shall, Rabbi! (*thrusts a sheet of paper into Rabbi Yosef's hands*) Here are your lines, we begin rehearsal tonight.

(*Lazaro gently pushes Rabbi Yosef offstage left.*)

LAZARO GRAZIANO: And send us a dozen of your best yeshiva students. Ones that can move and express themselves with ease and grace. No shmegegges or klutzes!

RABBI YOSEF: Yes, of course, I have several in mind.

LAZARO GRAZIANO: Magnifico! See you later!

(*Rabbi Yosef exits left.*)

LAZARO GRAZIANO: I told you we would have no problem with the Rabbi!

SALOMON USQUE: That was too simple. Somewhere, somehow, something is going to go wrong. I feel it in the wind!

LAZARO GRAZIANO: (*sniffs the air*) I think that is the odor of tonight's supper.

(*TAMARA GRAZIANO rushes in from right, gasping.*)

TAMARA: Father, father!

LAZARO GRAZIANO: My daughter, Tamara. How delightful to see you! You bring us news?

TAMARA: The Duke of Ferrara is coming!

LAZARO GRAZIANO: (*panicked*) What? Here? Now? With soldiers?

TAMARA: No! No!

SALOMON USQUE: That is a relief. For a moment, I thought she said the Duke was coming straight away!

TAMARA: Not now! Tonight! He is coming to see the play!

SALOMON USQUE & LAZARO GRAZIANO: The play!?!

(*Lazaro faints and falls in Salomon's arms; LIGHTS OUT AS MUSIC ["Chag Purim"] PLAYS AND IS SUNG OFFSTAGE BY THREE PRINCESSES AND TWO GUARDS while drapes or flats are removed to reveal theatre sets at mid-center, mid-right and mid-left.*)

THREE PRINCESSES & TWO GUARDS (O.S.): *(sing)*

Chag Purim, Chag Purim, Chag gadol hu la-y'hudim,

Masechot, ra'ashanim, z'mirot rikudim.

Hava narisha, rash, rash, rash!

Hava narisha, rash, rash, rash!

Hava narisha, rash, rash, rash!

Bara-ashanim!

Purim is a holiday when we sing and feast and dance!

Masks and songs, food and drink, join us in our glee!

Come, let us tell of bravery!

THREE PRINCESSES & TWO GUARDS (O.S., CONT.): *(sing)*

Watch as the evil Haman flees!

Hail to Queen Esther and Mordecai,

Standing strong and true!

*(LIGHTS UP FULL on a theatre set — a double-seated throne on platform at mid-center and a low banquet table at mid left; at mid right are two chairs. **THREE COURT SERVANTS** enter from right and stand at down right as they announce to the audience.)*

COURT SERVANT #1: Signoras e signores, your attention please!

COURT SERVANT #2: We announce the arrival of the Duke of Ferrara!

COURT SERVANT #3: And his lovely and charming wife, the Duchess of Ferrara!

COURT SERVANT #1: Please stand and give polite, respectful applause!

COURT SERVANT #2: So that your taxes are not raised!

COURT SERVANT #3: Nor your children sent to fight the King of Spain!

*(The **DUKE OF FERRARA** and **DUCHESS OF FERRARA** enter from right, assisted by the Court Servants; Court Servant #1 ushers them into the two chairs, the Duchess in the upper chair, then the Duke in the lower chair; Court Servant #2 prompts the audience to applaud; Court Servant #3 opens a parasol and holds it over the heads of the Duke and Duchess, who wave to the audience.)*

DUKE OF FERRARA: Thank you, thank you! Please be seated!

(Court Servants stand behind Duke and Duchess; Duchess waves parasol away and gestures to Court Servant #3 to close it; Salomon Usque enters from left and stands at down left, looking expectantly toward the Duke.)

DUKE OF FERRARA: *(with a flourish)* Let the play begin!

(Audience applauds as Salomon Usque crosses to down center.)

SALOMON USQUE: Signoras e signores, Duke and Duchess, it is our pleasure tonight to bring you a thrilling tale of romance and intrigue from ancient Persia. Prepare to be carried away—

(Lazaro Graziano enters from left in jester's outfit bearing an armful of graggars, which he tosses out to the audience.)

LAZARO GRAZIANO: Halloo! Hallay! Divertirsi! Divertirsi!

SALOMON USQUE: Lazaro! What are you doing!

LAZARO GRAZIANO: I am giving out graggars! *(to audience)* Every time you hear the name "Haman" spoken during the play, you must shake your graggar and make noise to blot out the sound of his name from the heavens! Like this! Haman!

(Lazaro shakes his graggar; Audience shake their graggars in response.)

LAZARO GRAZIANO: Magnifico!

SALOMON USQUE: Now that you have instructed us all in the art of graggaring, may we continue with the play?

DUKE OF FERRARA: Ahem! The Duchess would like to know if you have any more, how you say, "graggars"?

(Lazaro crosses to right to give a graggar to the Duchess but Court Servant #1 steps in front of him blocking his way; Lazaro gives the graggar to Court Servant #1, who hands it to Court Servant #2, who hands it to Court Servant #3, who hands it to the Duke, who presents it to the Duchess, who accepts it and smiles.)

DUCHESS OF FERRARA: Grazie!

(Lazaro bows deeply and falls over to great laughter among audience; he picks himself up and exits right as Salomon begins crossing to stand at down right, speaking as he walks.)

SALOMON USQUE: Many centuries ago, in the faraway land of Persia, there was a king by the name of Ahasuerus.

(KING AHASUERUS enters from behind wall at up right, followed by TWO GUARDS, and crosses to sit on throne with a Guard on either side; a crown sits on the vacant part of the throne next to King Ahasuerus.)

SALOMON USQUE: After a dispute with his wife, Queen Vashti, he banished her from the kingdom. And then, naturally, he sought a new queen to take her place.

KING AHASUERUS: I need a new queen! Send for all the young women in Persia, and have them brought here. I will interview them and see which is worthy of my kingly attentions.

(Guard #1 exits left.)

KING AHASUERUS: *(to Guard #2)* I will need some additional advice on this matter. Send for my chief adviser, Haman.

(Lazaro pops out from curtain at down right and waves a gragger, egging on the audience to do the same. Salomon tries to shush Lazaro and audience but fails as Guard #2 exits up right.)

KING AHASUERUS: And of course, I shall need the services of the court scribe, Mordecai. I wonder where he can be?

(MORDECAI enters from left and stands at down left.)

MORDECAI: *(to audience)* I am Mordecai. I am a Jew, whose family came to Persia many years ago after our Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by Babylonian invaders. Many Israelites live here in Persia, where the king has been fair and tolerant to all his subjects — until now.

*(Guard #1 enters from left leading **THREE PRINCESSES**, who cross to down center, where they bow and present themselves to King Ahasuerus; Guard #1 stands to left of throne.)*

KING AHASUERUS: Ah, yes, here come the princesses of Persia!

*(Guard #2 enters from up right, followed by **HAMAN**, who approaches the throne and bows to King Ahasuerus; Guard #2 stands to right of throne.)*

KING AHASUERUS: And now has arrived my adviser, Haman.

(Lazaro pops out from curtain at down right and waves a gragger, egging on the audience to do the same. Salomon throws up his hands in futility.)

HAMAN: I am here, your majesty, to assist in any way. Especially if it confound your enemies.

KING AHASUERUS: Enemies? *(laughs)* But I am not preparing for war. I am seeking a new queen. Let us review the candidates!

(Three Princesses dance and twirl in place as King Ahasuerus and Haman watch them. MUSIC PLAYS OFFSTAGE: instrumental version of “Chag Purim”. ESTHER enters from left and approaches Mordecai at down left.)

MORDECAI: Esther, my beautiful niece!

ESTHER: Mordecai, my wise uncle!

MORDECAI: The king is choosing a new queen. You must present yourself to the court.

ESTHER: But Uncle, to tout my beauty in such a manner would be vain!

MORDECAI: It is for the well-being of your people. You must!

ESTHER: Very well, dear Uncle. I will do according to your will, and to God's.

MORDECAI: Go then, but tell no one you are a Jew. There are those at court who seek to harm our people.

(Music stops; Princesses stop moving and kneel before throne.)

KING AHASUERUS: *(to Haman)* What do you think of these princesses?

HAMAN: Well—

KING AHASUERUS: They are all very beautiful, I suppose. But I fear none are worthy to serve as my queen.

HAMAN: Perhaps—

(Mordecai steps forward, Esther behind him.)

MORDECAI: Your majesty! I have a candidate!

KING AHASUERUS: My court scribe, Mordecai! Welcome! Who is this lady you bring forth?

(Esther steps forward, bowing; King Ahasuerus stands in surprise and rapture.)

ESTHER: My name is Esther.

KING AHASUERUS: Esther! That is not a name but a melody. A melody that sings to the deepest shadow of my heart!

HAMAN: Your majesty—

KING AHASUERUS: *(claps hands)* The contest is over! I choose Esther for my queen

HAMAN: But your majesty!

MORDECAI: The king has spoken! Hail, Queen Esther! *(to audience)* Hail, Queen Esther!

(Lazaro pops out from curtain at down right and encourages audience to shout along.)

LAZARO GRAZIANO: Hail, Queen Esther! Hail, Queen Esther!

(Princesses make way for Esther, who crosses to throne and kneels before King Ahasuerus; he puts crown on Esther's head.)

KING AHASUERUS: I crown thee, Esther, Queen of Persia!

PRINCESSES, GUARDS & MORDECAI: Hail, Queen Esther!

(Esther sits on throne next to King Ahasuerus as Princesses exit up right; Haman crosses to down center and speaks to audience.)

HAMAN: We shall see about this new queen Mordecai has conveniently discovered! *(exits up right)*

(Mordecai crosses to down left and turns to left as Two Guards sneak away from throne and meet at mid left by banquet table; King Ahasuerus and Esther sit in throne, frozen in place, holding hands.)

SALOMON USQUE: Not long after, Mordecai was in a remote part of the palace and overheard two of the king's guards at mischief.

GUARD #1: Is everything ready?

GUARD #2: We strike tonight! The king will be murdered in his sleep!

(Mordecai crosses to down center as the Two Guards exit left; Mordecai beckons to Esther, who leaves the throne and joins him at down center.)

MORDECAI: Dear niece, there is a plot to murder to the king!

ESTHER: I will inform him at once!

MORDECAI: Do so, but be careful of who else hears.

(Mordecai crosses to down left as Esther returns to throne, whispers in King Ahasuerus' ear; angered, the King rises.)

KING AHASUERUS: Death to all traitors! Have the plotters arrested and killed at once!

(Haman enters from up right.)

HAMAN: It is fortunate, my king, that this plot was prevented.

KING AHASUERUS: And it is my loyal queen who saved the day. We should all be so alert, chief adviser!

HAMAN: Yes, your majesty.

KING AHASUERUS: Carry on, as you were.

(King Ahasuerus and Esther exit up right; Haman bows as they exit, then crosses to down center and commands Mordecai.)

HAMAN: You, scribe! Come here!

(Mordecai crosses to down center.)

HAMAN: As chief adviser to the king, I order you to bow down before me.

MORDECAI: That I cannot do, chief adviser.

HAMAN: And who are you to disobey me?

MORDECAI: I am Mordecai the Jew. My people do not bow in worship to men. We pray only to Almighty God, the one true God of all humankind.

(Mordecai bows and exits left as Haman seethes with fury.)

HAMAN: I will have revenge upon this Mordecai and his people! I will tell the king that the Jews are plotting to overthrow the kingdom! And the king will give me full power to kill every Jew in Persia! *(laughs maniacally)* Let me see, when should this massacre begin? *(takes a pair of dice from his cloak)* I shall cast lots. *(kneels on ground)* The month of Tishri? *(rolls dice)* No, too close to the harvest. The month of Tebet? *(rolls dice)* Too cold! How about the month of Adar? *(rolls dice)* Yes! Perfect! When spring comes, Jewish blood will flow! *(exits up right)*

SALOMON USQUE: And so this evil minister told the king that there were enemies within Persia seeking to destroy the empire. He succeeded in getting permission from the king to deal with the matter. Without the king's knowledge, he issued a decree that on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, the Jews of Persia would be killed. When Queen Esther heard the decree, she sent for Mordecai.

(Esther enters from up right, Mordecai enters from left; they meet at mid left by banquet table.)

ESTHER: Uncle, the king has signed a terrible decree!

MORDECAI: I have heard. But the king does not know it is intended to massacre the Jews. You must persuade the king to take back his order.

ESTHER: Though the king loves me very much, I cannot speak to him unbidden on matters of state. If I displease him, I could be put to death!

MORDECAI: It is a risk you must take, my niece — for the sake of our people.

(Mordecai exits left.)

ESTHER: Mordecai is right. I cannot stand and watch as my people are destroyed by lies. I would rather disobey the king and die than let my people perish. I will fast and pray for three days and then request an audience with the king.

(Esther kneels; King Ahasuerus enters from up right, followed by Haman, and sits on throne with Haman standing to his right.)

KING AHASUERUS: The queen wishes to address me on matters of state?

ESTHER: Your majesty, I wish to invite the king and his chief adviser to a banquet I have prepared in your honor.

KING AHASUERUS: I accept the invitation.

HAMAN: As do I, your majesty.

(King Ahasuerus crosses to banquet table and sits next to Esther, who whispers in his ear as Haman steps forward to down center and soliloquys to audience.)

HAMAN: I know the purpose of this banquet! I will be rewarded for my efforts in ridding the kingdom of Jews! After my reward, I shall request the death of Mordecai. Let me see, how shall he die? I think the gallows would suffice! *(laughs maniacally)*

(Haman crosses to banquet table, bows and remains standing.)

KING AHASUERUS: Chief adviser, if you were king, how would you best show your gratitude to a man who has loyally served his ruler?

HAMAN: Gratitude? Well, I would dress him in the finest of robes and place a crown on his head. I would set him upon the king's finest horse and appoint the highest-ranking prince to lead him throughout the city calling so all the people could hear: "Here is the man the king sees fit to honor above all others!" *(chuckles)* Oh, yes, that is how I would reward such a great man.

KING AHASUERUS: Those are excellent suggestions, chief adviser. Now, join me in honoring a great man — the court scribe, Mordecai!

(Mordecai enters from left and Haman recoils in shock.)

HAMAN: Mordecai!

KING AHASUERUS: Mordecai was the man who discovered the plot to kill me. He is one of my most loyal servants.

HAMAN: But—

KING AHASUERUS: Chief adviser, prepare to bestow the highest honors of Persia upon Mordecai.

HAMAN: But your majesty, there is a decree—

KING AHASUERUS: A decree?

ESTHER: A decree has been issued in your name to kill all the Jews on the thirteenth day of Adar. And Mordecai is a Jew.

KING AHASUERUS: What?

ESTHER: And I, your queen — I, too, am a Jew. And, therefore, must die with my people.

KING AHASUERUS: *(stands)* This decree must be withdrawn at once! Who is responsible for such an abomination?

ESTHER: *(points to Haman, who has moved toward down center)* This evil man, your majesty. Your chief adviser, Haman!

(Audience shake their graggars, led by Duchess of Ferrara, who stands and vigorously shakes her graggar.)

KING AHASUERUS: Guards! Seize this man and send him to the gallows! He — and not the Jews — is the true enemy of my kingdom!

(Two Guards enter from left and grab Mordecai, dragging him offstage up right; Three Princesses enter from left, each bearing a plate of Hammantashen they place on the table.)

KING AHASUERUS: I appoint Mordecai my new chief adviser. And to my queen, Esther, I give thanks for her wisdom and loyalty.

ESTHER: Thank you, your majesty. Will you try a new delicacy?

(Esther offers the King a Hammantashen; he samples it.)

KING AHASUERUS: This is delicious! What do you call this delightful pastry?

ESTHER: Hammantashen — Haman's pockets.

(Audience shake their graggars, led by Duchess of Ferrara, who stands and vigorously shakes her graggar as Lazaro Graziano joins Salomon Usque at down center.)

SALOMON USQUE: And so our drama ends tonight, with evil yielding to force of right.

LAZARO GRAZIANO: We hope this play much pleasure brought, giving wholesome food for thought.

(Salomon and Lazaro turn to Duke and Duchess.)

SALOMON USQUE: And to our patrons noble and kind,

LAZARO GRAZIANO: We pray in grace their favor find.

(Salomon and Lazaro bow to Duke and Duchess.)

DUKE OF FERRARA: This play was very interesting. Does the Duchess agree?

DUCHESS OF FERRARA: Indeed! Someday I should like to play the role of Queen Esther!

DUKE OF FERRARA: *(chuckles)* As long as it be on stage and not off.

(Duchess frowns at Duke a moment without reply, then shakes her graggar in his face; Duke laughs and all characters enter and sing. MUSIC: "Ani Purim".)

ALL: *(sing)*

Ani Purim, ani Purim
Saméach umvadéach
Halo rak paam bashana
Avo l'hitaréach

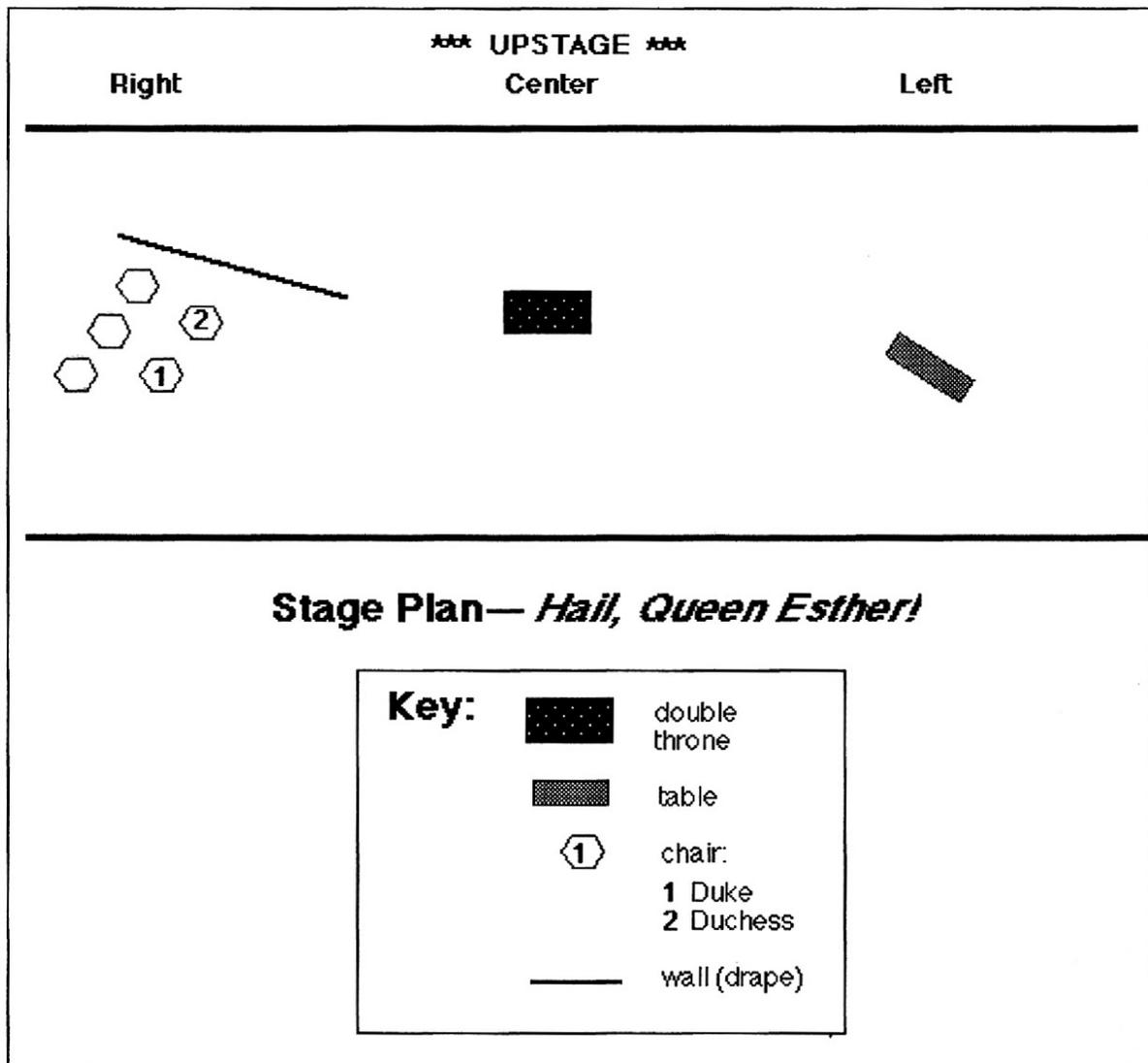
La-la-la-la-la-la!
 La-la-la-la-la!
 La-la-la-la-la-la!
 La-la-la-la!

It would be fun if Purim came once a month or twice a week!
 Let's make each day a day of joy, all hail Queen Esther's miracle!

La-la-la-la-la-la!
 La-la-la-la-la!
 La-la-la-la-la-la!
 La-la-la-la!

(LIGHTS OUT.)

* ***THE END*** *



Chag Purim

(traditional, arranged L.E. McCullough)

$\text{♩} = 120$



Chag Pu- rim, Chag Pu- rim, Chag ga- dol hu la- y'hu- dim,



Ma- se- chot, ra'a- sha- nim, z'mi- rot ri- ku- dim.



Ha- va nar- i- sha, rash, rash, rash! Ha- va nar- i- sha,



rash, rash, rash! Ha- va nar- i- sha, rash, rash, rash!



Ba- ra- a- sha- nim! Pu- rim is a ho- li- day



when we sing and feast and dance! Masks and songs, food and drink.



join us in our glee! Come, let us tell of bra- ve- ry!



Watch as the e- vil Ha- man flees! Hail to Queen Es- ther and



Mor- de- cai, stand- ing strong and true!

~ **How to Use This Play** ~
by *L.E. McCullough, Ph.D.*

Israel shall be a proverb and a by-word among all people. — I Kings, 9:7

*What is hateful to you do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah.
The rest is commentary. — Hillel, Jewish scholar, 1st century B.C.E.*

*Other books were given to us for information. The Bible was given for transformation.
— Anonymous*

THIS PLAY IS one of 12 plays from my collection titled *Plays of Ancient Israel*.

The land of Israel is the birthplace of two major religions (Judaism and Christianity) that inspired a third (Islam). The 12 plays in this book celebrate one of the greatest sources of faith and legend in the world — the Tanakh, or Old Testament, of the Bible.

As many modern writers have shown, myths and tales are not simply escapist fantasy; they are one of the chief ways a child learns about the adult world and how to live in it.

Bible stories not only transmit points of belief or doctrine but communicate essential relationships about human nature. As a child, the Bible was the first book of truly grown-up stories I remember reading. Mother Goose and Dr. Seuss were entertaining in their clever way, but Bible stories had sticking power.

Talk about *Adventure* with a Capital A! Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, David and Goliath, Samson and Delilah, Sodom and Gomorrah and all that sea-parting, lion-smiting, jawbone-bashing, bush-burning derring-do — the eternal cosmic struggle between good and evil played out in the mundane lives of ordinary men and women, earth-bound but always seeking the promise of salvation beckoning beyond the stars.

Added to the Biblical base are legends from the Midrash, a body of Jewish sacred and legal literature intended to offer in-depth interpretations of the Scriptures and Judaic religious law. *Midrashim* are to the basic Bible tale as a blueberry cheese knish is to a plain potato — layer upon layer of extra richness and flavor embroidering the core text.

Plays of Ancient Israel will not only be of interest to followers of Judaism and Christianity. The stories dramatized here are part of world mythology and world history, among the earliest efforts to celebrate and explain humanity's ongoing relationship with the divine.

It is my hope that *Plays of Ancient Israel* will make these stories more accessible to readers of all religious affiliations, to spread the wonder inherent in these larger-than-life tales of faith and — in some cases — incontrovertible fact.

Plays of Ancient Israel can also be combined with studies in other disciplines: history, science, language arts, dance, music, social studies, etc. The plays are set in the ancient Middle East; feel free to decorate the set with architecture, plants and art objects specific to that region.

If you are a music teacher and want to add songs and music to any of the plays, go ahead and make it a class project by organizing a chorus or having students select appropriate recordings to play before and after the performance.

Besides those children enrolled in the onstage cast, others can be included in the production as lighting and sound technicians, prop masters, script coaches and stage managers. *Plays of Ancient Israel* is an excellent vehicle for getting other members of the school and community involved in your project.

Maybe there are Jewish or Middle Eastern dance troupes or accomplished performers of Jewish or Middle Eastern music in your area; ask them to give a special concert or lecture when you present the play. There are undoubtedly several knowledgeable scholars at your local library, art museum, synagogue, church or college who can add interesting tidbits about the customs and folklore that provide background for these tales.

Try utilizing the talents of local school or youth orchestra members to play incidental music ... get the school art club to paint scrims and backdrops ... see if a senior citizens' group might volunteer time to sew costumes ... inquire whether any local restaurants might bring samples of Jewish or Middle Eastern cuisine.

Most of all, have lots of fun. Realizing that many performing groups may have limited technical and space resources, I have kept sets, costumes and props minimal. However, if you do have the ability to build a seaworthy sailing vessel for *Noah's Ark: Falsehood and Wickedness Hitch a Ride* or can fashion a facsimile of a Persian palace for *Hail, Queen Esther!* — go for it! Adding more music and dance and visual arts and crafts into the production involves more children and makes your play a genuinely multi-media event.

Similarly, I have supplied only basic stage and lighting directions. Blocking is really the province of the director; once you get the play up and moving, feel free to suit cast and action to your available population and experience level of actors.

When figuring out how to stage these plays, I suggest you follow the venerable UYI Method — Use Your Imagination. If the play calls for a boat, bring in a wood frame, an old bathtub or have children draw a boat and hang as a scrim behind where the actors perform. Keep in mind the spirit of the old Andy Hardy musicals: “C’mon, everybody! Let’s make a show!”

Age and gender. Obviously, your purpose in putting on the play is to entertain as well as educate; even though one typically thinks of palace guards and prophets as being male, there is no reason these roles can’t be played in *your* production by females; likewise for other gender-free representations of angels, spirits and Voices of God.

After all, the essence of the theatrical experience is to suspend us in time and ask us to believe that anything may be possible. Once again, UYI!

Adult characters, such as grandparents and “old wise men/women” can certainly be played by children costumed or made up to fit the part as closely as possible, or they can actually be played by adults. While *Plays of Ancient Israel* are intended to be performed chiefly by young people, moderate adult involvement will add validation and let children know this isn’t just a “kid project”.

If you want to get very highly choreographed or musically intensive, you will probably find a strategically placed onstage adult or two very helpful in keeping things moving smoothly. Still, *never* underestimate the capacity for even the youngest children to amaze you with their skill and ingenuity in making a show blossom.

Plays of Ancient Israel is a fun way to introduce children to one of the richest traditions in world literature. And for adults, these plays offer a chance to recapture the joy and excitement we all felt the first time we heard the thrilling words “In the beginning God created the heavens and earth ...”.

Who says you can’t be a kid again? Just heed the call of the *shofar* and follow the animals two by two ... mind that burning bush lurking round the corner!

THIS PLAY is part of a larger collection of plays by L.E. McCullough titled **Plays of Ancient Israel** presenting 12 exciting one-acts from the Bible and the treasure trove of Jewish folklore.

CONTENTS

- 1) King David’s Harp
- 2) Jonah and the Whale
- 3) Noah’s Ark: Falsehood and Wickedness Hitch a Ride
- 4) Dare to Be a Daniel!
- 5) Ruth and Naomi: The Healing Power of Friendship
- 6) Samson and Delilah
- 7) Tales of Angels
- 8) What Is a Brother?
- 9) The Prophet and The Rabbi
- 10) The Wisdom of Solomon
- 11) Chanukah: Come Light the Menorah!
- 12) Hail, Queen Esther!

* For more tips on staging your classroom play, see the book by L.E. McCullough titled:

**Anyone Can Produce Plays with Kids — The Absolute Basics of Staging Your Own
At-Home, In-School, Round-the-Neighborhood Plays**

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Anyone Can Produce Plays with Kids is an essential primer for teachers, parents and youth leaders.

Parts One through Seven show the how-to basics of playmaking, from organizing a company and selecting a script to assembling costumes and props, running rehearsals and handling the production’s technical aspects.

Part Eight translates theory into action by presenting three plays in detail from top to bottom — adaptations of a Native American folktale, the story of how the song *Silent Night* originated and a lively staging of Hoosier poet James Whitcomb Riley’s *Little Orphant Annie*.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, visit www.EducationalClassroomPlays.com